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ABSTRACT

The number of golf courses in the Myrtle Beach area is constantly changing. So too, are the number of new residents who decide to buy or build homes or condominiums near these golf courses. This thesis explores the utilization of golf courses by residents of the particular golf course community. Primary research is performed and analyzed concerning four Myrtle Beach area golf course communities. The study shows that primary home ownership, retirement, membership of the golf course, and prestige of the golf course are all positively associated with usage of the golf course. The results of the study may be used for marketers, golf course developers, and managers to better identify golf course community homeowners, a target market often overlooked.

INTRODUCTION

The 60 miles of coastline known as Myrtle Beach's Grand Strand is constantly changing and expanding. New attractions are appearing, new restaurants are available, there are an array of music theaters to enjoy, a multitude of golf courses to play, and new housing communities are being built every where you look. People are coming from all over the United States and all over the world to see what the beautiful coastal area has to offer. Tourists are not just visiting either; they are buying condominiums, houses, and lots in order to live in the Myrtle Beach area. In fact, Myrtle Beach has been ranked as the second fastest growing city in net annual population growth from 1995-2005 by American Demographics (Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce, 1999). Anticipated growth in residents is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Anticipated Growth of Population in the Myrtle Beach Area

Year	Population
1970	16,992
1980	101,419
1990	144,053
1996	163,856
Projected 2000	205,500
Projected 2005	241,200
Projected 2010	289,200

Source: Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce, 1995

Not only is the population growing, but so too is the number of golf courses. At the end of Summer 1999, with the completion of the Tournament Players Club course, the Grand Strand

included one hundred golf courses. Important questions include; how is the increase in population growth related to golf course expansion? How important is golf course utilization and golf course development related to housing? More specifically, how does primary versus secondary homeownership in these communities relate to-golf course utilization? This study attempts to provide some preliminary answers to these questions.

New golf courses are constantly being built; the Grand Strand golf course market is quickly becoming saturated. The questions above are important for golf course owners, managers and developers because additional courses to this area must meet the golf course market and make an individualistic impression on the population of golfers in and out of the Myrtle Beach area. For a new or old golf course and housing community in the Grand Strand area to be profitable, these people must recognize and cater to the type of people interested in living here and playing golf here. "The market for golf-oriented real estate is a sub-market that can be defined as a segment or niche whose population has specific characteristics related to income, tenure, age, and lifestyle" (Muirhead and Rando, 1994). In other words, it is imperative that a market analysis is conducted to determine the strength **and** nature of golf and its players as well as the real estate market for the area.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Golf is one of the fastest growing sports and businesses in the country. It is ranked by the National Sporting Goods Association as number 11 of the sports played by the United States population. From a sample of 235,460 people studied by the National Sporting Goods Association, 23,959 people play golf six or more times a year (National Sporting Goods Association, 1995). The number of golf facilities in 1995, as reported by the National Golf Foundation totaled 14,074 with 490,200 rounds being played on these courses (Huffman, 1996). Throughout the United States the number of golf courses with homes built on them have grown. Of the 442 golf courses which opened around the country in 1996, 32.6% of them included real estate (McUister, 1997). South Carolina is in the top ten states with openings combining golf and housing in 1996 (McLeister, 1997). The number of new housing permits in the Myrtle Beach area was 4,054 in 1996, up from 3,203 in 1995 (Table 2). Currently there are over 70 golf courses that associate with housing communities in the Myrtle Beach area. The Myrtle Beach area market is also attractive to home buyers. In a recent article in the *Sun News,* several local appraisers believe that real estate as a whole in this area is increasing in value. This is especially evident "in older communities built around existing golf courses" (Burch, 1997).

TABLE 2
Residential Construction Permits in Myrtle Beach, 1995 - 1997

	New Buildings	Units	Value
1995	2,078	3,203	$215,957,723
1996	2,207	4,054	$273,221,402
1997	2,330	144	$334,350,500

Source: Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce, July 1998

Moreover, the cost of living in Myrtle Beach has been considered very affordable. As of July 1997 the average new home with 1800 square feet cost $129,420. The average size home is

considered to be 1800 square feet including a living area, three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a two-car garage. The average cost to rent an apartment with two bedrooms and two bathrooms, of 950 square feet, is $557.50 (Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce).

The presence of a golf course near residential communities seems to promote the formation of a club and a neighborhood feeling. A golf course nearby adds many additional benefits for homeowners, open spaces, manicured lawns, and ponds that are visually attractive and appealing. Many developers try to locate housing as close as possible to the golf course to capture these benefits. In fact, golf course frontage may increase residential land values by over $10 per square foot (Huffman, 1996). Of course with everything, there are negatives to golf communities. Golfers heading to the links create traffic problems and noise, disturbing area residents. Also homes close to individual holes can lead to golf-related injury and property damage (Muirhead and Rando, 1994). Aside from the positives and negatives of golf course ownership, a marketer must be aware of how the homeowner plans to utilize the golf course.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

It is obvious that golf course home developments are increasing in number, as is the population that is migrating to Myrtle Beach to live in these homes. Golf course utilization is clearly important to developers and managers because better understanding of the utilization levels of primary and secondary homeowners can help developers better balance between building residential areas for each of the types. Managers and marketers are better able to improve their effectiveness at serving each of these market groups, as well as targeting those outside the residential developments at times not preferred by owners. Certain factors would appear to affect golf course utilization more than others. The expected influence of these factors is described in the following hypotheses.

Golf is a unique sport in that it can be played by people of all ages. Also, golf takes a long time to play. Those older in age seem to have more time to spend on a golf course. "Because of the leisurely pace, more than 10 percent of men age 65 and older are still teeing off" (Crispell, 1993). Considering the endurance needed in golf is not too high, the older population is able to participate more. In addition due to the baby boomers increasing in age, the number of golfers aged 18 to 34 is expected to decrease. The number of golfers between the ages of 35 to 54 is expected to grow by 16 percent between 1991 and 2000 (Crispell, 1993).

H1: Age will be positively associated with the usage of the golf course facilities.

Golf is known to be an expensive sport to play. A set of clubs costs anywhere from $500 to $5,000. Moreover, it can be quite costly to play on courses in the Myrtle Beach area. This is especially true during the spring when some courses charge up to $200 for one round. Lots and homes in a golf course community are known to bring a higher price than those not near a golf course. In fact, "prime sites that front on greens or that enjoy water views or fairway and open-space vistas can command twice the average fairway premium" (Muirhead and Rando, 1994). Thus, income should be related to the amount of golf one plays.

H2: Income will be positively associated with the usage of the golf course facilities.

As the number of people moving into the Grand Strand area increases, so too does the number of retirees. 7% of retirees will relocate at retirement. Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina are the top states by way of population for retirement living. Of those people, 50% prefer a Coastal lifestyle (Mason). Retirees are most likely able to play golf and they have the most time available to spend on a golf course. *Money Magazine* rated the Grand Strand as one of the top

twenty places to retire in the United States in 1996. Between 1970 and 1996 there has been a 317% increase in the number of retirees living in the Myrtle Beach area, from 5,000 to 20,840 (Myrtle Beach Chamber of Commerce). Also, many property managers of golf course communities agree that the majority of the retired homeowners play golf (Hale).

H3: Retirement will be positively associated with the usage of the golf course facilities.

When a family or an individual join through a membership program at a club, a fee may have to be paid as an initiation. Subsequently after that time annual or monthly fees will also have to be paid to the club. With the rights of membership, members are given various benefits. These include lower golf rates, discounts in the pro shop and grille, as well as a sense of belonging within the community. Furthermore, switching costs are high, as the initial membership fees are not refundable. With these aspects taken into consideration, members are likely to spend a predominate amount of their golf playing time on their "home" course. "Affordable accessibility to high quality golf has been cited as a distinct marketing advantage when targeting the mid-level market; (membership) greens fees at many clubs are under $50.00" (She, 1996). As a result, it is expected that membership will be associated with usage of the community's golf facilities.

H4: Membership of the country club in the golf course community of the residence will be positively associated with the usage of the golf course facilities.

It is interesting to know if the golf course in the community is a primary reason for the homeowner to reside in the golf course community. "Premiums for real estate are related directly to the quality of the golf course as consumers perceive it" (Muirhead, 22). It is commonly realized that the more prestigious the course is, so too are the homes that surround it. If the family or individual enjoys the golf course, they may be likely to purchase a home near it and then will in turn play the course more often. In 1998 *Golf Digest* published a "Places to Play in Myrtle Beach" article. Included in the article were rankings for several local golf communities in the Myrtle Beach area. Golf Community A, Golf Community B, and Golf Community C each received a rank between one to five stars with five stars being the highest. Community A received the most amount of stars with four. It is likely that prestige will be positively associated with this course in particular. Community C's courses received between 3 to 3 1/2 stars. Community B's courses came in third with a ranking between 2 1/2 stars and three *stars Golf Digest,* 1998). A fourth community, Golf Course Community D, was not listed in the *Golf Digest* article perhaps because this course just opened to the public recently; however, it is considered to have a strong reputation as a course to play in the Myrtle Beach area. Considering three of the four courses are published in a national magazine, the prestige of the course should affect the usage of the course facilities by homeowners.

H5: Prestige of the course as a primary draw to buy a home in the respective community will be positively associated with golf course usage at the respective golf course.

Furthermore, to identify whether these held beliefs about the golf course being a primary draw to buy in the respective community, the following hypothesis is also tested.

H5a: Prestige of the course as a primary draw to buy a home in the community will be most positively associated with Community A, then D, C, and B, respectively.

One hundred forty thousand people will move to South Carolina this year to live

permanently (Mason). With the number of primary residents in the area, it is most likely these people will have more opportunity to play golf at the nearby golf course than secondary homeowners will. Due to the warm climate, secondary homeowners in this area are known to visit their property usually in the winter or spring. Primary homeowners are able to play the course year round. Also many courses in the area, including the golf facilities in question offer reduced rates to locals in particular months of the year.

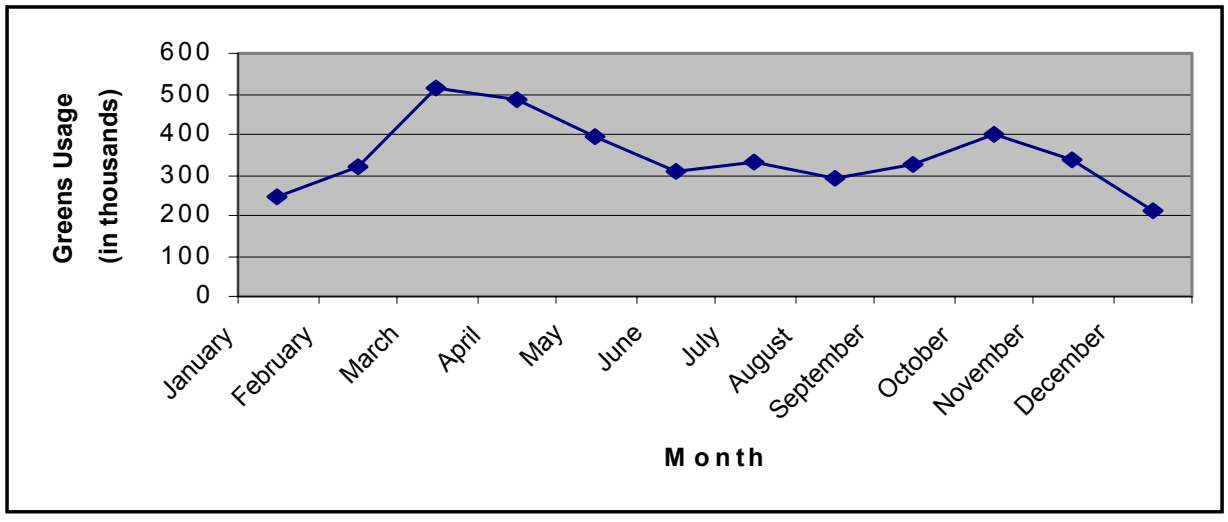
H6: Primary homeownership will be positively associated with golf course usage.

Furthermore, Myrtle Beach is known for its golf. During particular months of the year, the majority of golf rounds are played (Figure 1). These months, in spring and fall particularly, greens fee rates commonly increase to the public as the courses become more inundated with golfers.

Homeowners are more likely to play when it is easier to get on the courses during the winter and late summer months, when course demand is lowest as shown by Figure 1. With spring (February - May) the most popular season to play, as shown, it is expected that golf course utilization during spring will not differ by primary and secondary homeowners. Fall is also a time when golf courses get the most play as shown by September through November in Figure 1. Primary homeowners may be less likely to use the golf course facility during these months.

H6a: Primary homeownership will be most strongly associated with golf facility usage in winter and summer months.

FIGURE 1
Greens Usage by Month (in thousands), 1998



Source: Myrtle Beach Golf Holiday, 1999

METHODS

Several steps were taken to gather the primary research to investigate the hypotheses stated above. Data for the study came from 100 homeowners from each of the four different golf course

communities: A, B, C, and D. These communities were chosen based on two criteria: (1) all vary in size, housing cost, and location in the Grand Strand area; and (2) the homeowner association or management company at each community was willing to cooperate in the study. Homeowners were selected at random to be included in the sample for each community by dividing the number of residential units by 100, and using this number (n) to pick each nth person on the list for inclusion into the sample. An overview of each of these communities is provided below. The four developments each have individual characteristics help to provide more generalizability to the study results. The golf course communities studied use predominately the same type of advertising. Mainly they publicize locally through the *Sun News*, billboards, brochures, and direct mail. Also, they use regional magazines such as *Homes and Land, Carolina Fairways, and Carolina Living.* In addition, several of the properties have their own web-sites.

Survey Design and Study Variables

The survey included questions concerning home-ownership, membership in the country club, and rate of usage questions. Homeowners were asked if the particular home is their primary or secondary residence. Homeownership was coded 1 if secondary and 0 if primary. Membership in Country Club was coded 1 if a member and 0 if not.

The usage questions consisted of five questions asking the respondent about the frequency of utilization of the golf course itself, the practice facilities (range, practice putting green, etc.), retail items in the pro shop, the grill room or restaurant, and teaching instruction. The homeowners were able to rate these 'factors on a 1 to 7 Likert-style scale, with I being never and 7 being very frequently. Principal components analysis was run on these questions and one factor was the result (eigenvalue=3.185, variance explained 63.71%). The reliability of these 5 measures was also acceptable at alpha =.84 . As a result, responses to the five questions were summed for input into the regression equation.

Additional usage questions centered on the seasons of spring, summer, fall, and winter. Homeowners here were asked to rank aggregate usage of the golf course facilities on a scale of 1 to 7, one being never and 7 being very often. These variables were called Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter.

The survey included several examples of primary reasons for people to move to a neighborhood, allowing the respondent to check any that apply to them. These included; the golf course facility, family/schools, price, the Myrtle Beach location, ocean accessibility, the neighborhood, job relocation, investment, and climate. Of primary interest to the present study was the extent to which the golf course itself was a primary reason for buying a home in the neighborhood. Prestige was therefore coded I if the respondent indicated that the golf course was a primary reason for buying and 0 otherwise.

The survey also asked several demographic questions, including age, income, and retirement plans. The respondents could answer in one of six categories in reference to age groups: 18 to 24, 25 to 35, 36 to 45, 46 to 55, 56 to 65, and over 65. Several different household income levels were also broken down: Under $25,000, $25,000- 49,000, $50,000 - 74,000, $75,000-99,000, $100,000-124,000, $125,000-149,000, and Over $150,000. The question concerning retirement plans included optional responses of: I am currently retired, I plan to retire in 5 years, I plan to retire in 10 years, I plan to retire in 10-15 years, and I have no retirement plans. Respondents were to check the appropriate box next to the item that best described them. For the present study, Retired was coded 1 if the respondent was retired, and 0 otherwise. Finally, Golf Course/Community was also coded, as A, B, C, or D.

All of the questions were carefully selected and placed strategically to reduce bias. In addition, the survey was kept fairly short, the front and back of one page, to increase the probability of response (Alreck and Settle, 1995). The surveys sent to the residents of each community were identical with the exception of indicating the respective country club and community name within each survey. A letter was drafted to each of the homeowners detailing the project and the purpose of the survey. This letter was customized to each respondent to increase probability of response, and accompanied the survey in the mail out to each of the homeowners.

Regression analysis was completed to test Hypotheses 1-6, with Golf Course/Community as a control variable, since usage rates may also be a function of the course itself. Analysis of variance with post hoc comparisons with Bonferroni correction was done to test Hypothesis 5a, and ANOVA was also used to test Hypothesis 6a.

RESULTS

From the 400 surveys that were mailed out, 37 were "returned to sender", and 172 were returned completed, with a resulting response rate of 52.2%. The number of surveys returned by each course were; Community A - 51, Community B - 29, and Community C B 59, and Community D - 33. The number of primary residents who responded was 154, and the number of secondary residents who responded was 18. Missing data reduced the number of completed surveys with usable data to 125, for an effective response rate of 31.25%, which is substantially higher than single-mailout response rates on mailed surveys (Alreck and Settle, 1995). Descriptive statistics are presented for all of the variables in Table 3, and the correlations are listed in Table 4.

TABLE 3
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	S.D.
Course	2.848	1.078
Primary Home?	.006	.246
Membership?	.592	.493
Frequency of usage:		
Spring	3.672	2.331
Summer	3.728	2.270
Fall	3.824	2.363
Winter	3.440	2.277
Age	4.816	1.081
Income	3.752	1.389
Overall Usage	12.976	6.527
Club/ Course	1.680	.604
Prestige	.528	.501
Retired	.616	.488

N = 125

TABLE 4
Correlations

	Course	Private Home?	Member?	Spring	Summer	Fall	Winter	Age	Income	Usage	Club/ Course	Prestige
Course Prim.	-.085											
Home?	.337**	-.115										
Member?	.384**	-.118	.640**									
Spring	.336**	-.142	.599**	.818**								
Summer	.417**	-.175	.657**	.933**	.850**							
Fall	.369**	-.224*	.613**	.910**	.816**	.892**						
Winter	-.066	.014	.191*	.219*	.164	.145	.227*					
Age	-.133	.330**	-.184*	-.252**	-.221*	-.247**	-.279**	-.326**				
Income	.271**	-.135	.675**	.824**	.808**	.846**	.756**	.105	-.123			
Usage	.247**	.465**	.803**	.475**	.407**	.458**	.379**	.169	.030	.487**		
Club/Course	.359**	-.015	.617**	.571**	.468**	.569**	.572**	.151	-.135	.544**	.536**	
Prestige	-.005	-.062	.349**	.328**	.247**	.304**	.306**	.660**	-.320**	.303**	.264**	.209**
Retired?												

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
N=125

The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 5, concerning the six hypotheses in question and the dependent variable of usage of the golf course. The R^2 for the regression equation is equal to .491, and the adjusted R^2 is .463, with F=17.908 ($p<.001$). According to this analysis, H_1 was not supported. In fact, the coefficient was negative and its standard error large relative to the coefficient. This result may be somewhat logical, given the mean responder age of between 55-65. The positive association of income and course usage was not supported in H_2, ($p=.97$). H_3, relating to retirement of the homeowner and golf course usage was supported ($p<.05$) with retirees more likely to use the golf course facilities. It was predicted that membership of the country club would positively affect golf course facility usage in H_4, and the results supported this hypothesis ($p<.001$). Also supported was the relationship between prestige of the course, H_5, and usage of golf course facilities ($p<.01$). Finally the hypothesis of primary home-ownership with golf course facility usage, H_6, was not supported ($p=.70$).

TABLE 5
Results of Regression Analysis of Golf Facility Usage

Variable	Coefficient
Income	-.001
Course	.133
Age	-.901
Retired	2.037*
Member	6.038***
Prestige	3.252***
Primary Home	-.597

N= 125 F = 17.908 ($p < .001$) $R^2 = .49$ / Adj. $R^2 = .463$
* $p < .05$ ***$p < .001$

In addition to the regression analysis, ANOVA was used to analyze $H5_a$, the relationship between prestige of the golf facility and the four particular courses. While the results of the ANOVA, Table 6, indicated differences in perceptions of prestige of the golf course across the four golf course communities (F= 14.39; p<.001), the results did not support the assumption that Community A was considered most prestigious. In this study, more homeowners from Community C (mean= .77 p>.001) chose the golf course as primary reason for buying a home in the community than did the homeowners at Community D (mean=.44; p<.01), Community A (mean=.353; p<.001), and Community C (mean =.149; p<.001). There were no significant differences between any of the other three communities on prestige of the golf course as a reason for buying a home.

TABLE 6
ANOVA Table for Differences in Prestige By Golf Course/Community

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Prestige	Between Groups	8.778	3	2.926	14.385	.000
	Within Groups	34.170	168	.203		
	Total	42.948	171			

To test $H6_a$, an ANOVA was run to determine whether seasonal usage of golf course facilities differed between primary and secondary homeowners. As shown in Table 7, the results indicated differences by season by homeowner type for summer (F=4.463; p=.036; Primary-mean=3.85; Secondary-mean= 2.46), fall (F=7.475; p=.012; Primary-mean =3.95; Secondary-mean=2.29), and winter (F= 12.105; p=.00; Primary.. 3.62; Secondary mean= 1. 5 3), while there was no significant differences between primary and secondary homeowners in golf course facility usage in spring (F=.868; p=.35; Primary mean,=3.78; Secondary mean=3.14). Therefore, H6 received support. In fact, not only did primary homeowners use golf course facilities more than secondary homeowners in winter and summer but also in fall.

TABLE 7
ANOVA of Seasonal Golf Course Usage by Homeowner Type

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Spring	Between (Combined)	4.803	1	4.803	.868	.353
	Within Groups	841.457	152	5.536		
	Total	846.260	153			
Summer	Between (Combined)	22.883	1	22.883	4.463	.036*
	Within Groups	769.058	150	5.127		
	Total	791.941	151			
Fall	Between (Combined)	35.253	1	35.253	6.475	.012*
	Within Group	827.507	152	5.444		
	Total	862.760	153			
Winter	Between (Combined)	59.073	1	59.073	12.105	.001***
	Within Groups	746.669	153	4.880		
	Total	805.742	154			

***p=.001, *p<.05

DISCUSSION

The study confirmed several of the hypotheses identified. Membership was positively associated with golf course facility usage. This may have been due in part that 59% of the homeowners who responded are members at their respective course. Retirement was also positively associated with golf course facility usage. As mentioned earlier, there is a wide market of retirees in the Myrtle Beach area. The majority of the respondents were 55 or older, the prime age of most retirees. The third hypothesis was that golf course facility usage is associated with the prestige of the golf course. Many of the golf courses selected have more than one eighteen hole track. Also, some of the golf courses selected have better and more numerable practice areas, as well as in more knowledgeable teaching instructors. This can sway many homeowners, especially if they are avid golfers, to decide to buy a home in that location.

Relationships not supported in the present study included the positive association between age and golf facility usage. This may be an artifact of the sample respondents themselves, since the mean respondent age was 55 - 65, higher values of age would correspond to older retirees, who could be expected to play less than younger retirees. Therefore, additional surveys might be done to target younger residents as well. Secondly, the relationship between income and golf facility usage was also not supported. With average annual household incomes of just over $50,000, this includes a wide range of incomes including the upper income bracket. The majority of the respondents are fairly well off, income may not be a strong predictor in this population. Finally, primary home ownership was not positively associated to golf course facility usage. Primary homeowners may not have the time to play that people just visiting their properties are bound to have. Also many primary homeowners may live in the particular developments due to increased home value on golf course land or the pleasant landscape that surrounds golf course homes.

Golf course facility usage when compared with the four different seasons of the year also was strongly affected by homeownership patterns. Primary homeowners do take advantage of the golf course facility out of the regular "golf season" months of summer, fall, and winter. This is probably due to lower golf course rates at this time as well as fewer people on the golf course.

This study reinforces the idea that homeowners are attracted to housing communities if they contain golf courses. Whether it is for the actual golf course facility or the open-manicured grass, more and more people are moving to Grand Strand golf course communities. It is also obvious that many of these people are retirees or soon to be retired. As retirees, they have more time to spend on the golf course. Also it is evident that members use the golf facility more often than non-members. Golf course marketers, developers, and managers should be aware of the homeowners surrounding their golf course. Myrtle Beach golf depends quite a bit on the tourist/ golfers that come into town for vacation, and often overlooks the property owners of their course. Managers and marketers may want to consider special incentives for retirees to join their club. These may include a reduced membership rate and perhaps special golf tournaments for senior citizens. Also marketers and mangers should be aware that many of the homeowners may only visit their property a few months of the year. Keeping a database of these members/ homeowners and when they usually visit would increase customer service and make the homeowners feel welcome. Golf course developers should keep in mind that the golf course should play "friendly" to the older age group. Often this is a practice for both retirees and out-of-town golfers. In addition, golf course developers must keep in mind the prestige of the course. Many of the respondents who played golf moved to the particular development mainly because of the high quality golf facility. If a developer concentrates on just the course alone and not on the practice facilities, pro-shop, and grille they may lose a vast amount of their customer base. Very little research has been conducted in the Myrtle Beach area concerning usage of the golf course and home ownership. It is important for golf marketers, managers, and golf course developers alike to be aware of this market and preferences in a golf course facility.

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